

Contact Information

North Dakota

Fort Ambercrombie State Historic Site

P.O. Box 148, Abercrombie, ND 58001
(701) 553-8513, (701) 328-2666
www.DiscoverND.com/hist

Fort Ransom State Historic Site

State Historical Society of North Dakota
612 E. Blvd. Ave., Bismark, ND 58505
(701) 328-2666
www.DiscoverND.com/hist

Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park

4480 Ft. Lincoln Road
Mandan, ND 58554
(701) 667-6340
www.NDparks.com

Camping reservations in ND state parks
(800) 807-4723

South Dakota

Fort Randall

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
P.O. Box 199
Pickstown, SD 57367
(605) 487-7845
www.usace.army.mil

Fort Sully

Farm Island Recreation Area
1301 Farm Island Rd.
Pierre, SD 57501
(605) 773-2885
www.sdgfp.info/Parks

Fort Sisseton Historic State Park

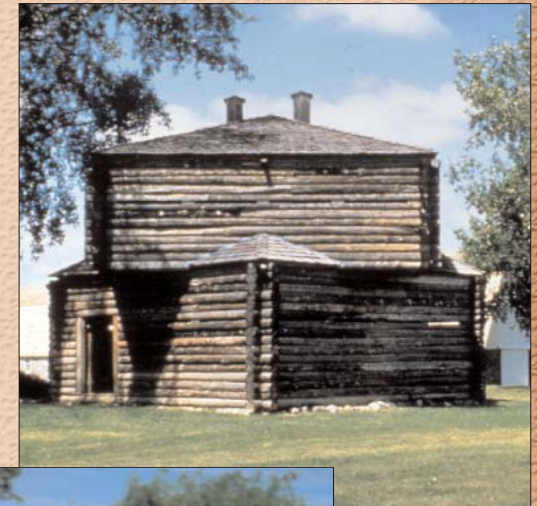
11907 434th Avenue
Lake City, SD 57247
www.sdgfp.info/Parks

Camping reservations in SD state parks
(800) 710-2267 or www.CampSD.com

Explore Dakota Forts



Dakota Forts



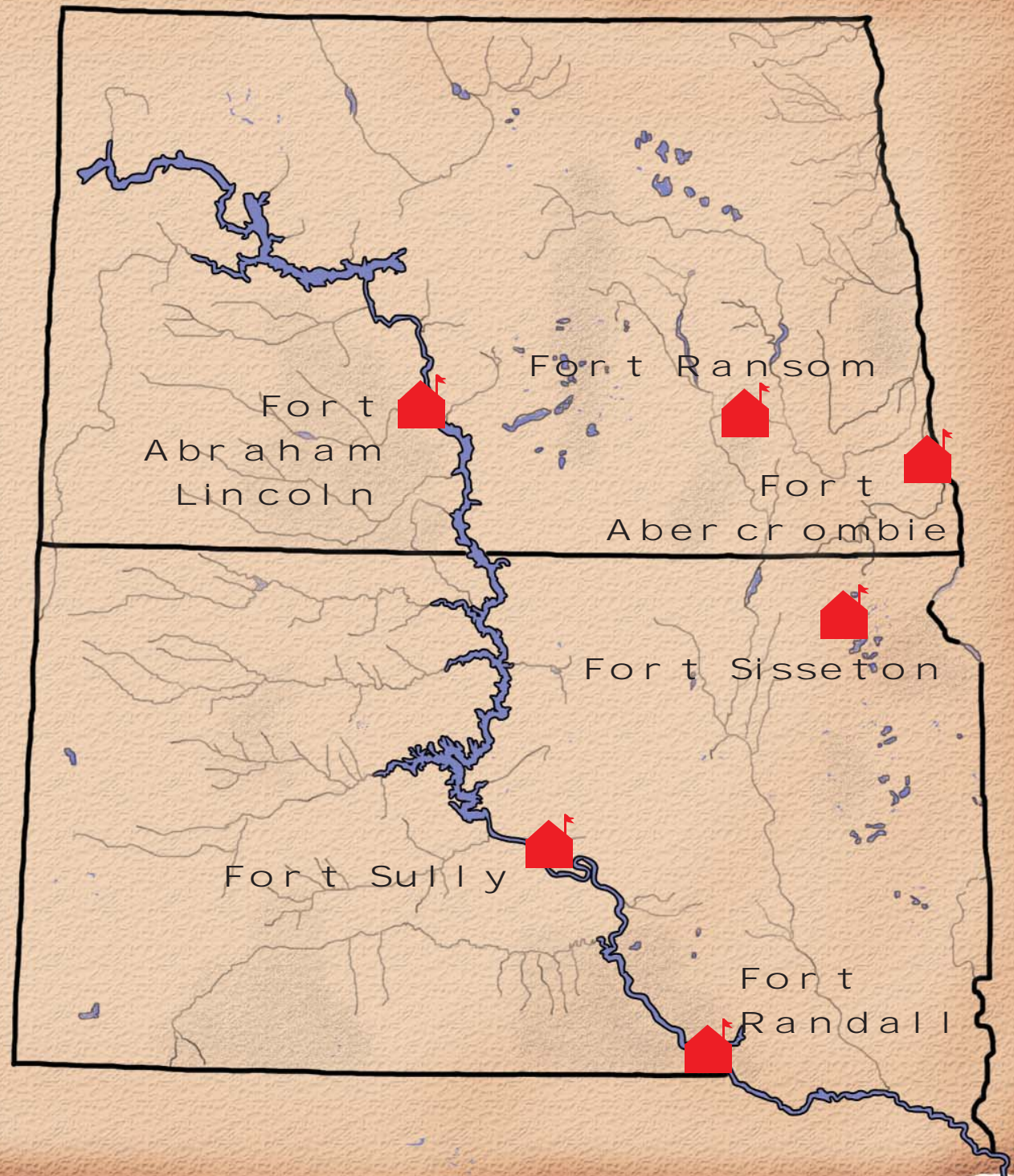
This brochure is a cooperative effort by the
South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks,
the North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department,
and the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

12,000 copies were printed at a cost of \$.12 each. 2004

Military Forts in the Dakotas

By the mid-1840s, thousands of pioneers were heading west in search of new opportunities in California and Oregon. These migrants were traveling through, not stopping to settle, so they posed little immediate threat to the Plains Indian tribes. Later, as pioneers chose to stake claims in this area, American Indian tribes took action to protect their lands. A breaking point came in 1862, when fighting broke out between American Indian people and white settlers in the Minnesota River Valley. Soon after, military forts were established westward across the Northern Plains to protect pioneers, miners and others who came to stay.

This brochure will introduce you to a few of these forts, but the best way to learn their history is to visit the sites. Each of these six forts has interpretive information to help you gain a better understanding of the role they played in Great Plains history.



Fort Randall

Located near Pickstown, SD, below Fort Randall Dam on the west side

The Fort Randall Military Post, named for Colonel Daniel Randall, served many functions from the time it was built in 1856 until the fort was abandoned in 1892. During that time, the post provided military protection to settlements along the Missouri River, escorted many wagon trains and survey parties, and served as the central military supply depot for the area.



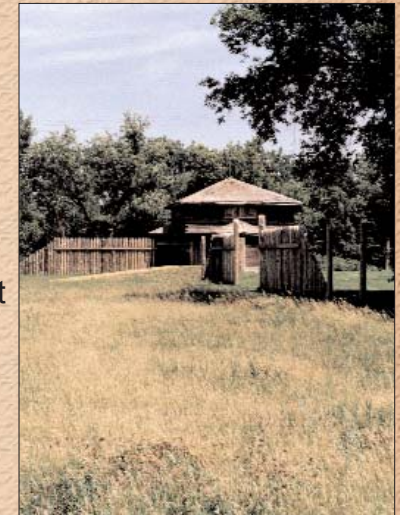
Today, all that remains of the fort buildings that housed approximately 500 men are several foundations which have been excavated, the Fort Randall Post Cemetery and the Fort Randall Chapel. A self-interpretive trail leads visitors around the site. The Fort Randall Visitor Center tells the history of the fort and its occupants.

Other Facilities – Fort site is open year-round. No fee. ADA accessible. Fort Randall Dam and Powerplant, Fort Randall Visitor Center nearby. Camping available at nearby Randall Creek Recreation Area with 132 electrical sites, four camping cabins, showers and boat ramp; and at North Point Recreation area with 111 electrical sites, six camping cabins, showers, swimming beach, trails and boat ramp.

Fort Abercrombie

A designated North Dakota State Historic Site, located on the east edge of Abercrombie, ND

Lt. Colonel John J. Abercrombie established Fort Abercrombie on August 28, 1858, on the Red River in Dakota Territory. Because of the threat of flooding, the fort was moved to its present location in 1860. It was the first permanent U.S. military fort established in what was to become North Dakota and was also the only post in the area besieged by Dakota warriors for more than six weeks during the Dakota Conflict of 1862.



The fort served to guard wagon trains and steamboat traffic on the Red River and was also a supply base for wagon trains headed to the Montana border. The fort was at the crossroads of several major transportation routes in the Northern Plains until its abandonment in 1877.

County Road #4 divides the site into two parts. The first includes recreational facilities and a local museum. The second is the actual historic site that has a reconstructed stockade, two reconstructed blockhouses and one original fort guardhouse. A fieldstone monument is located near the center of the grounds. West of the site is a parking lot accessible from the county road.

Other Facilities – Open year-round. No fee. Museum (admission fee required) open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursday through Monday, May 16-September 15. Audiotape available for rent, self-guided walking tour. Limited ADA accessibility.

Fort Sully

Located at Farm Island Recreation Area,
4 miles east of Pierre, SD, off Hwy. 34

General Alfred Sully and his men were sent to the Missouri River to make the area safe for homesteading pioneers. They established a fort built with cottonwood logs near Pierre in 1863. The fort was the first in a series of posts along the Missouri River which, over the next fifteen years, extended the power of the Army to the Rocky Mountains.



Fort Sully was abandoned in late summer, 1866, because of the deplorable conditions. There was no grass or wood within two miles, muddy river water had to be hauled to the fort, and rats, mice and fleas were everywhere. A new Fort Sully was constructed about 30 miles upriver. The old fort was dismantled to use as fuel for steamboats.

No buildings remain, but markers indicate the corners of the fort. The Farm Island Visitor Center stands in the center of old Fort Sully and provides exhibits that help visitors learn more about the fort.

Other Facilities – Park is open year-round. Visitor Center with interpretive displays open by appointment. Park entrance license required. ADA accessible. Campground features 90 campsites (60 w/ elec.), two camping cabins, showers, RV dump station, hiking trails, swimming beach, wheelchair accessible fishing dock, boat ramp. Canoe, paddleboat and bicycle rentals.

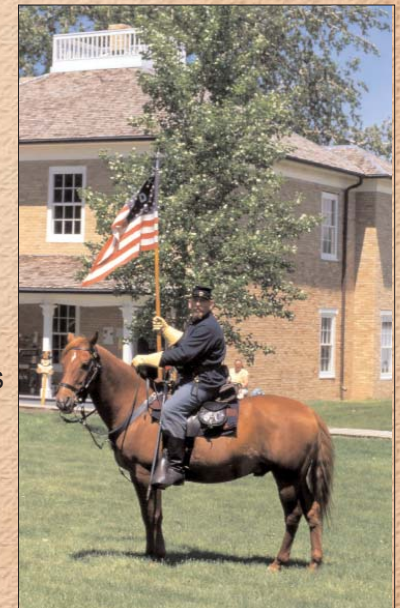
Fort Sisseton

Located at Fort Sisseton Historic State Park,
10 miles southwest of Lake City, SD, off SD Hwy. 10

Fort Sisseton was established in 1864 to provide military protection to new settlers in the region. Originally named Fort Wadsworth, the site was chosen because it offered a strong natural defense, as well as an ample supply of timber and stone for building material and clay for making bricks. The perimeter wall surrounding the fort consisted of earthen breastworks and a ditch. At its prime, approximately 120 to 200 enlisted infantrymen were stationed at Fort Sisseton.

The fort was abandoned as a military outpost in 1889, after 25 years of operation. In 1959, the South Dakota legislature designated Fort Sisseton a state park. Fourteen of the original fort buildings have been restored both inside and outside. Special events are held at the fort throughout the year, including the Fort Sisseton Festival in the first weekend in June and the Frontier Christmas the second weekend in December.

Other Facilities – Park open year-round. Visitor center and fort buildings open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week, Memorial Day through Labor Day. Open remainder of the year by appointment. Park entrance license required. Visitor Center has a museum and gift shop. First-person guided tours. Buildings and equipment available to rent for special events. Campground features 14 campsites (10 with electricity), three sleeping cabins plus a cooking cabin, rental tipi and Sibley tent, tent camping area, showers, hiking and horseback riding trail, and adjacent lakes for canoeing, boating and fishing.



Fort Ransom

A designated North Dakota State Historic Site,
located approximately one-half mile SW of Fort Ransom, ND

Fort Ransom, established in 1867 to protect overland travel from Minnesota to Montana, was named in honor of Brevet Major General Thomas E. G. Ransom of the US Volunteers. On June 17, 1867, a battalion of the 10th US Infantry, commanded by Brevet Major George H. Crosman, arrived and began work on enclosing a breastwork, completing it by August. Oak logs from the nearby Sheyenne River Valley were used to construct the post. Outside the breastwork were quarters for Indian scouts.

Survival at this military post was a constant struggle. Water for drinking and cooking had to be hauled from a spring 600 yards away. The nearby river was used for bathing during the summer. A vegetable garden was near the post, but hay for livestock came from three miles south.

Fort Ransom was dismantled in 1872, and the materials were used to build Fort Seward at Jamestown. Today, although the building locations and dry moat are still clearly visible, nothing else remains of the original fort.

Other Facilities –
Open year-round.
No fee. No facilities on site. Limited ADA accessibility. Camping available at Fort Ransom State Park two miles north of the town of Fort Ransom.



Fort Abraham Lincoln

Located at Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park,
7 miles S of Mandan, ND on Highway 1806

The military was dispatched to this area in preparation for the coming of the Northern Pacific Railroad. An infantry post was built overlooking the Missouri River in June 1872. A year later, Congress authorized the addition of a cavalrypost. By 1874, the fort housed a total of 650 men, making it one of the largest and most important forts on the Northern Plains.

Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer was the first commander of the enlarged fort and served there from 1873 until he and the 7th Cavalry departed for the Little Big Horn River on May 17, 1876. The fort continued to be the headquarters of the 7th Cavalry until June 1882. The fort gradually declined in importance and was abandoned in 1891.

Many important post structures have been rebuilt and are open to visitors. They include the home of George and Libbie Custer, an enlisted men's barracks, 7th Cavalry stable, granary, commissary storehouse and infantry post blockhouses.

Other Facilities – Open year-round. Entrance fee required. Additional fee for guided tours. Visitor center, On-A-Slant Mandan Indian Village earthlodges. Campground features electrical sites, showers, RV dump station, camping cabins, hiking/biking trails, riverboat, trolley and guided trail rides.

